

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

DARRELL DELANEY

Have you ever stopped to think about how deeply Jesus cares for you? In John 17, we get a rare and powerful glimpse into Jesus' heart as he prays directly to the Father. Specifically, in verses 6-19, Jesus prays for his disciples, expressing his love, care, and desire for them to live in unity and truth. What can we learn about Jesus' intercession for his followers, and how does it inspire us to live out our faith? Join us as we dig into this incredible passage and uncover its relevance for our lives today, next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in part two of our three-part series, in a deeply intimate and revealing moment. This is called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer section. In John 17:6-19, Jesus is praying for his disciples specifically. He prayed for God to glorify him, as he had been glorified before the world began in the first part...in the first episode; and in this episode, we are going through where he prays for his disciples.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Again, we call it the High Priestly Prayer, which, as we said in the previous episode in this three-part series, we call it that, not because Jesus uses the language of being a high priest, but he does the work of a high priest because he is interceding. He is doing what the high priest always did, and that was to connect God to God's people. In this case, to connect the Father to the disciples, and the Father to all of us; and as we also said at the beginning of the previous program; you know, when you listen to somebody pray, you learn a lot about them, and we are learning a lot about Jesus here in John 17. We know here what Jesus' deepest concerns...what his priorities are...the things Jesus values the most. We hear it all in what is almost a conversation within the Trinity. Jesus, the Son of God, speaking directly to his Father, and now speaking also about the Holy Spirit. So, this is a very holy moment. It invites us to understand more about our relationship with God through Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, let's jump into it. In verses 6-10, Jesus says: "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them."

He says they were yours. You have given them to me. So, it is really important for us to remember that our relationship with God is not something we manufacture, it is a gift, and we have been given it; and the Father is the one who has entrusted us to Jesus, the ones who believe in him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is interesting here, as you were reading those words there, Darrell, a moment ago, it occurred to me that Jesus has given the disciples maybe a little more credit than they deserve, because he says: I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted that. They know that I came from you. And yet we know, just three

chapters earlier, in John 14, Philip says: Hey; show us the Father; and Jesus says: You have been seeing the Father all along; and he said: We have?! The main thing to notice here is that if we also today are Jesus' disciples...if we are his followers...it is not because, as a certain song says: *I have decided to follow Jesus...* No; Jesus says: The Father gave you to me. This is all a gift; this is all grace.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is beautiful because God is intentional. One of the things I pray in my prayers that comforts me is that God had a date on the calendar for every moment. It is not by accident; it is not by happenstance; it is not by: Oops, I just stumbled into it. No; God actually ordained and planned this; and we were saved and we were chosen by his design; and Jesus' prayer reassures us that we were chosen, and we are known and we are loved by God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; we were given this gift; we were given to Jesus by the Father, and that, again, is just so, so lyric. As you said, none of this was accidental...none of this was just happenstance. This was part of a plan, that we got adopted into the divine family.

DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful reminder of adoption because, I mean, I know many families, and I am sure you know some families who decided that they wanted a family, and they didn't go by the conventional means, but they went to the adoption agencies and orphanages and said: We want this child. We want to love this child, bring this child into our home. It is nothing that the child did, but it does change the life of the child. So, I mean, Paul goes into this relationship-adoption thing in Romans, where he talks about how we are adopted as children of God; and so, God, by design, is choosing us, and Jesus is showing us in the prayer that we have been given the relationship with God as a gift.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In one of his books, Richard Lischer, the preacher and former homiletics professor at Duke Divinity School, says that, you know, it is the kind of story that could never get old for a child who was adopted. The parents could tell the story about how they went to the orphanage and they looked at all the children, and at one point, the little child says: And out of all of the ones in the orphanage, you picked me, right? That story never gets old.

But let's listen to some more here in verses 11 and 12 in John 17:

"I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled."

DARRELL DELANEY

Now Jesus knows his time on this earth is coming to an end, and he wants to pray for their protection, because he knows the world is hostile. Actually, he told them earlier that the world hates him; therefore, no servant is greater than his master; and therefore, the world will hate them. So, he knows that he is sending them into a hostile and challenging situation. He is not praying for their physical protection, he is praying for their spiritual protection. It kind of reminds me, Scott, of like, every morning...weekday mornings in our household, we pray for each other before we go off to work and school; and we rotate. Everybody prays. So, the idea is that we pray for God's protection; we pray for God's provision to go before us; and a lot of parents have understood this, even in situations where kids are going off to college, they are going off to move into the world...they are moving away. We cannot be with our kids every day, but we can pray for God's presence to protect them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Jesus is being very tender here. He loves the disciples. He knows that he will physically be ascended into heaven soon, and he is going to talk more about that eventually; about the Holy Spirit, and so forth; but what

he really needs them to know is that when he is gone, they are not orphans—they are not left defenseless. They still have a protector in the Father; the Father will take care of them, and that is why Jesus is praying for them; and we will talk more about this, but he is really praying, also, for their unity, Darrell, that they may be one. Jesus has unity with the Father. That unity is perfect and unbreakable; and he calls for us to strive for something similar, even though, Darrell, we know that all too often we do fall into disunity; we do fall into divisions and disagreements over preferences and misunderstandings. Jesus is hoping that despite the long odds at being united, maybe we can achieve it after all.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we will talk more about that in our next segment when we talk about what the disciples will face in their challenges that they will face in the world, and how Jesus' prayer gives them hope and direction. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we have been talking about Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 17:6-19. We talked about Jesus' tender words of love, protection, and unity; and we want to move into his heart even deeper now, as he acknowledges the reality of the world that his disciples are going to live in, and what it means for us today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is verse 13; so, John 17:13: "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them."

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Jesus is praying for his disciples to experience joy. Of course, we know joy is not based on your circumstances. I always talk to my kids about how the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat. A thermometer reads the temperature. A thermostat sets the temperature. Joy is the temperature that Jesus is setting. Even though the circumstances are grim if you look at them. He is getting ready to head to a cross. He is getting ready to die. He is getting ready to give his life; but he asks for the Father to give them—the disciples—his joy that would never fade.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As somebody once said: Happiness is a first feeling. Happiness crops up pretty much where you would expect it: birthday parties, weddings, you got a promotion at work; you are having a great vacation. Happiness! That is where happiness lives. But joy is deeper. Joy is not a first feeling, it is a second feeling. Joy is what can emerge, even in the midst of suffering; joy in the hope of the resurrection is something you would feel even when you are sorrowful at the grave of a loved one who has died. You are not going to feel happy there, but you can feel joyful there. And so also, Jesus is going to find joy emerging from what he accomplishes on the cross; and he is saying here: Look; my disciples are going to have sort of an ongoing relationship with suffering and persecution; that doesn't mean they cannot still have my joy deep, deep within them.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is beautiful that joy is something that the world cannot take away from us; and Paul demonstrates this in his letter to the Philippians. He is actually telling them in verse 4 of Chapter 4: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Now, remember when he says that, he is in prison. So, he had just gotten persecuted. He has been beaten, he has been locked up, and he is writing about joy in the middle of a Philippian jail...in some dark and smelly

jail. It is really crazy how the circumstance did not define for him what joy was; and for believers, we can take our joy, even in the midst of suffering.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; let's continue in verses 14-16 of John 17. Jesus praying about the disciples: "I have given them your word and the world has hated them; for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Jesus is making it clear that they are not to be taken out of the world. We are not supposed to be removed from the situation; because Jesus knows there is a mission. The mission was for him to inaugurate the kingdom of God when he came; and for the Holy Spirit to infill the disciples so they could continue that work of spreading the good news. If he removes them from the world, how in the world are they going to do that? So, he knows that they need to be strengthened in the world so that they can continue that mission.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the world where we need to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. As you just said, Darrell, if God beams them up, like on *Star Trek*...if he takes them out of the world, nobody is left to proclaim the gospel. So, the world is rough, the world is tough, the world is going to hate them, even as it hated Jesus; but that is the venue in which they have to work; and so, that is the venue in which God (Jesus) asks his Father to keep protecting them. Keep them on their feet as long as possible so they can do the work of proclaiming the gospel.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the work of the gospel is to let their light shine so that others can see the way to the kingdom. It is kind of like the light in a lighthouse. There are storms going on; there is fog going on; and the only way that those ships are going to make it safely to shore and not damage their ships on the crags and on the shore is for the light to shine; and so, as disciples, we are called to let our light shine, like what Matthew 5 says: When they see our good deeds, they will glorify our Father in heaven, is what Jesus has taught them; and Jesus is now praying for them to have that power to continue through the Spirit to let their light shine so people can know.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And how is that going to happen? Well, Jesus tells us next in verse 17, when he prays this: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

DARRELL DELANEY

Sanctification is a process where you are set apart for God's holy use and holy purpose. So, Jesus is asking the Father to shape and prepare the disciples by the truth of the Word. It is not something they can do on their own; it is not something that they can do by themselves; the Word of God actually cleanses us and sets us apart; so that is why our own devotions and our own Bible studies are very important; and getting into the Word, because the Word can show us how we ought to live, help us to repent, come to our senses, and be a witness in an effective way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus is praying that God will transform them, that the Father will change them; and you know, it is...the process of sanctification is like how gold is refined, right? The raw ore is placed in a furnace. It heats up and the impurities rise to the surface, and what is left is pure gold. So, Jesus is asking God to sanctify the disciples...to refine them through his Word. His Word, which in the book of Hebrews 4:12: God's Word is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to the dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

So, that is what God's Word is. It is not just some dusty collection of ancient writings; it is alive; it is dynamic; it is powerful; and it can shape our very lives.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know, I was thinking about that gold refining process. It has been said that the person who is doing the refining, after the heat is turned up, the way they know it is done is that they can see their reflection in it...they look in and see their face in it. So, the heat of suffering and trials can happen in our lives; but when the Father can see his face in our lives, I mean, that is the point of his being glorified, right? So, the Word of God helps us to get there; and that is the part where the Lord is showing us how we can remain open in being used by him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Verse 18, continuing: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."

So, Jesus is sending them into the world. They need to be transformed, refined like gold; and once that happens, that is not just to get them ready to go to heaven. No; it is to get them ready to go into the earth and to proclaim the good news of the kingdom.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, they are being sent. It just reminds me of the great commission in Matthew 28, where Jesus says: ¹⁹Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I commanded you. And surely I am with you always, (even) to the very end of the age."

So, they are called to be sent. Lesslie Newbigin says this. He says: You are not a disciple because you are called, you are a disciple because you are sent; and Jesus is sending them by the Spirit into the world so that they can continue that mission.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then, just to round out the section we are looking at in this second program of this three-part series, verse 19...John 17:19: "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."

So Jesus, Darrell, is really saying something very profound here. He is saying: Look, I am fully dedicating myself to the mission of the cross so that my disciples can also be fully set apart for their mission.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is like the person who believes so much in their company that they are willing to invest their own money and they are putting their own skin in the game. Now, Jesus is quite literally putting his own skin in the game here. He doesn't need to be sanctified. He is holy; he is spotless; he is blameless; but he is living by example, showing that he believes in the mission of the Father so deeply, he is willing to give his life for it; and that is the inspiration and example that he is giving to the disciples, so that they may do the same.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; what you just said there, Darrell, it reminds me of the time when Jesus came to be baptized by John. It was a baptism of repentance, and John says to him: You don't need this. Jesus says; Let it be so for the sake of righteousness. People need to see this, that I am earning the righteousness for them so I can give that to them. Here also, Jesus' holiness can become our holiness when we allow him to sanctify us.

But in just a moment, we will explore how Jesus' prayer challenges us to live as a sanctified people in this often hostile world. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and so far, Scott, we have unpacked Jesus' prayer for his disciples...for their protection...for their sanctification...recognizing that his truth equips them for the mission he is now sending them to. So, what does that mean for today? That is what we want to talk about in this final segment as we wrap up this program. How do we live as sanctified people in a world that feels resistant and hostile to the faith sometimes?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; well, it is very clear. If we sort of take our marching orders from John 17 here, as the disciples were to do, as Jesus prayed for them, we know that we have to stay rooted in the truth of God's Word. We need to stay connected to God through prayer. We need to reflect his light to the world; and so, we can ask ourselves: Are we grounded in God's truth? Are we letting God's Word and Spirit nurture us? Are we bearing fruit in a way that reflects his kingdom? So, we want to talk about that as we round out this second of three programs on the High Priestly Prayer of John 17.

We are going to flesh out three things, Darrell: 1) Stay rooted in God's Word; make it a daily habit to read scripture. 2) Live as Christ's ambassadors. Look for ways to serve and engage the world while holding fast to that faith and that truth. 3) Prioritize prayer in community. Seek God's strength in prayer and surround yourself with fellow believers who can encourage and challenge you. So, let's look at each of those three things as we close the program.

DARRELL DELANEY

All right, great. So, start by staying rooted in the Word of God. Jesus prayed this in John 17:17: "Sanctify them by your truth, for your Word is truth." If we make God's Word a daily part of our lives, and scripture is our anchor, it will convict us, it will challenge us, it will help us to grow; and we will see, not only the example of how we should live, but we also will be empowered and strengthened in our inner being when persecution and trials come.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and it reminds us of Psalm 1, which describes a person who delights in God's Word: ²but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. ³That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we are like that tree planted by streams of water. When we immerse ourselves in the Word of God, we are planted and we are nurtured, and we will bear fruit because that is what we do when we are connected and rooted in God's Word; and Jesus sends us into the world as well. So, that is the next part.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; to think about living as Christ's ambassadors. As Jesus has fully admitted here, the world is not an easy place for disciples; the world is a hostile place; it hates Jesus; it hates the disciples. So, we have to engage with a hostile world, engage with culture, but we also have to hold firm to our identity in Christ. It reminds me of what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:20:

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Of course, we understand how ambassadors work. They are from other places. They go into a country not their own. They represent the culture, the government, and the representation of another place, but it is as if the officials were there. So, as Christians, we are not of this world. We are aliens, foreigners, and strangers in this world; and we represent his kingdom here. It would be just like he would be here if we lived the way he called us to live. That is what an ambassador means. That is what we are called to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, our homeland is God's kingdom. We all carry two passports on our bodies. I have a passport that says I am from the United States, but I have a more important spiritual passport that says I am from the kingdom of God; and as I live out the kingdom values...live out things like the Beatitudes, and what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, that is where the world is going to see Jesus. That is how they are going to see his kingdom; and it is going to come, you know, through lots of small acts of faithfulness.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in Acts 10:38, it says the disciples went around doing good. They actually, not only spread the kingdom with these words, but with their actions. So, one small act of kindness can have a ripple affect in this world. So, we are called to take care of God's creation in Genesis, and I think that cultural mandate...that scriptural mandate...still remains. There is this kid that I know who likes to pick up trash around the neighborhood. They are like: What are you doing? He says: I am taking care of the earth that God has given us. Now that opens a conversation of faith, opened in that situation that might have otherwise not have been there, because he was able to not only with words say what he said, but do his deed of what he did in order to honor God with the things that he has done.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes our lives preach better sermons than our words. You know, when we live with integrity and compassion and humility, when we bear the fruit of the Spirit, like that tree in Psalm 1, planted by the Word of God, we will bear fruit. But we don't do it solo, and that is our third takeaway; that we have to stay connected to Christ through prayer, but also, Darrell, through community. In John 17, Jesus is praying for his disciples. He is modeling something critical for the importance of staying in constant communication with God. So, we do stay connected with God through prayer, but also through community.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, no one person is an island, and we are called to work together and be a part of the believers who assemble together. Hebrews 10:24, 25 remind us: And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

So, we see that they are being encouraged, even back in their day, before a pandemic, before all the things that are happening now, he is saying that there is a habit of people who don't want to get together. So, he is saying: No, but you need to come together so you can encourage one another and spur one another on to good deeds. We need that as believers.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it reminds you of Acts 2, when the world was so struck with the fact that the earliest believers after Pentecost had all things in common, they had fellowship. They got together to break bread and to pray. So, the world took note of that. That is what Jesus wants us to do. We are not alone; obviously, Jesus is interceding for us; but he is interceding for all of us together; for his entire Church, which is his Bride. Hebrews 7:25: Therefore he (Jesus) is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

As we close out this program, Darrell, that is such a comforting thought. No matter what challenges we face in this hostile world as we seek to live out our faith, as we seek to bear that fruit, as we seek to be a community of love, Jesus keeps praying for us.

DARRELL DELANEY

He is the one who is on our side, showing us by word and deed that he is in our corner. He is our divine intercessor; he is our mediator between the Father and us; and so, I thank God that he is the one able to help us to live as sanctified people in the mission of this world, so that we can make the world know that he is who he says he is, and that he can do what he said he can do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And for that, what can we say but what we always say at the end of our programs: Thanks be to God. Thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we study the conclusion of Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17:20-26. Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, where you can share what *Groundwork* means to you and make suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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